

News Release



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Kempthorne Announces New Policies to Improve National Wildlife Refuges

Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne today announced new policies that define the unique wildlife conservation mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and will help refuge managers enhance opportunities for people to participate in wildlife-dependent recreation.

“In an age when the rapid spread of technology and changing land uses makes the connection to nature seem out of reach to many Americans, these policies will help ensure our national wildlife refuges continue to be places where wildlife thrives and where recreational and educational activities that depend upon wildlife get the top priority,” said Secretary Kempthorne. “We have a responsibility to conserve our nation’s diverse ecosystems, preserve our outdoor traditions, and foster a sense of environmental stewardship for future generations.”

Secretary Kempthorne announced the three policies in a televised broadcast during the annual meeting of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. The new policies implement the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 and have been previously issued in draft for public comment. Developed in close coordination with State fish and wildlife agencies, the new policies encourage refuges to provide additional recreational opportunities and provide the tools managers need to ensure recreation programs are compatible with the mission of the refuge.

The first policy defines the official mission, goals and purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the Refuge system is “To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” This policy declares the Refuge system as the only network of lands in the country created and managed solely for wildlife conservation. By stating the goals and purposes of the Refuge system, all 545 unique wildlife refuges across the country will function as a complex network of diverse and distinct habitats.

The second policy creates the tools for refuge managers to provide and enhance opportunities for families to participate in wildlife-dependent recreation, and prioritize those activities above other uses. Hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation are all wildlife-dependent activities on which refuge managers will focus their resources. This policy provides refuge managers with

guidance on how to plan visitor services that will allow for enhanced opportunities for quality wildlife dependent recreation. Focusing on wildlife-dependent recreational activities, refuge managers are also encouraged to work with state agencies to create more compatible opportunities for refuges.

The last policy on “appropriate uses” creates consistent guidelines for refuges to administer and structure activities, ensuring that refuge managers across the country are following consistent processes when they are asked to permit a variety of activities. The policy provides a framework to determine if activities that are not wildlife-dependent may be appropriate for a particular refuge.

“These policies will ensure that we meet our conservation goals while offering more opportunities for families to enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation,” noted U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall. “In addition, the policies will encourage consistency in the way we manage the Refuge System.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fish and wildlife management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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